DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 896 CS 209 988

AUTHOR Page, Helen Ward
TITLE Teaching Critical Thinking in the English Literature Survey Courses.
PUB DATE 18 Oct 85
NOTE 34p.; Paper originally presented at the City Colleges of Chicago National Conference on the Future of Literature in the Community College (1st, Chicago, IL, October 18, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Processes; *Community Colleges; Critical Thinking; Educational Objectives; *English Curriculum; English Instruction; *English Literature; *Introductory Courses; *Literature Appreciation; Student Development; Student Motivation; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS Blooms Taxonomy; *Thinking Skills

ABSTRACT

English literature survey courses can and should be taught as part of junior and community college curriculums. However, since students in any one course may have different levels of learning and ability, it is important to structure courses so that students do not face tasks that they are unable to successfully complete. Teachers should be aware that theory can be adapted for practical classroom application in six specific areas: (1) intrinsic worth of the subject matter, (2) content choices within the course, (3) provision of background and context for lectures, (4) class discussion and questioning, (5) writing assignments, and (6) testing. When teachers understand students' learning levels and styles, they are less likely to be frustrated with their students. (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED272896

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ENGLISH LITERATURE SURVEY COURSES

Helen (Lyn) Ward Page

Oakton Community College

(originally presented to the National Conference on The Future of Literature in the Community College, October 18, 1985 Chicago, Illinois)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Helen Ward Page

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS209988

English literature survey courses should--and can--be taught as an integral part of our junior and community college curricula. The first part of this paper will indicate that this "should" provides a new perspective on the argument that "everyone should read Beowulf," and is based on significant recent work in the theory of higher education. The second portion will then deal with six ways in which theory can become practice in our own literature classrooms.

Wallace A. Russell's recent article, "The Fiery Fall and Incredible Rise of Liberal Education" provides a useful survey of the three reports which have appeared recently on the status of curriculum in higher education. The first of these, "Involvement in Learning," was submitted in October, 1984, by the National Institute of Education to the Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell. The report recommended less specialization and fewer vocational courses in degree programs and suggested a return to at least two full years of liberal education as a part of all four-year curricula. It also recommended that the college curriculum provide students with the opportunity to develop greater skill in the areas of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, terms which may ring various bells for readers whose background in educational theory has included a nodding acquaintance with "Bloom's Taxonomy." The second of these three reports was written by William J. Bennett, who later succeeded Bell as Secretary of Education. Writing as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, in "To Reclaim a Legacy," he also criticized excessive narrowness and specialization and called for the central role of the humanities in the college curriculum. He further stressed the fact that liberal learning gives students a clearer relationship to the content and values of Western

Civilization, in science and technology as well as in the arts, literature, philosophy and history. (Russell 2-3) In February, 1985, the Association of American Colleges published a report entitled "Integrity in the College Curriculum," and proposed a restructuring of undergraduate education around nine basic areas of experience. Several of these relate directly to the topic at hand, and are called, in the original language of the report:

1) Inquiry, abstract logical thinking, critical analysis
2) Literacy: reading, writing, speaking
3) Understanding numerical data
4) Historical consciousness
5) Science
6) Values
7) Art
8) International and multicultural experiences
9) Study in depth in one area

The report goes on to state, having expanded in some detail on each of the nine areas, that, "The problem with the American college curriculum is not that it has failed to offer up knowledge. The problem is that it offers too much knowledge with too little attention to how that knowledge has been created and what methods and styles of inquiry have led to its creation." (AAC report 24)

Clearly, we have national support for the inclusion in our curricula of such liberal arts courses as the English literature survey. However, the questions remains, to what end do we teach this particular course, if not only to provide knowledge? In other words, can we help our students learn how to

learn not only for the content of this course, but as a part of their entire educational experience? Might this course be particularly well suited to such goals? And, a question which is at least as significant and probably more difficult to answer than any of the preceding: how can we restore, add or resuscitate such a course for students whose ability to succeed with this material seems markedly diminished, as compared to that of students of only a few years ago?

It seems logical to begin by surveying the theories of higher education which have recently described the learning and developmental level of the people in our classrooms. Marjorie Davis and Charles C. Schroeder have called some of them the "New Students," and they have indeed been identified in numerous studies as measurably different from many college students of fifteen and twenty years ago. They differ not only in their apparent desire for more vocational training and for knowledge which translates directly into potential for economic gain, but, as those of us who teach in open enrollment institutions know, they are often students who would not have attended college at all under limited admissions standards. Davis and Schroeder suggest that Patricia Cross may be right in her definition of "New Students" as requiring more concrete, practical and immediate learning experiences. When a sample of nearly 1,100 private college freshmen was tested between 1978 and 1980 on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, these "New" students comprised 60 percent of the sample. This instrument categorized such students as "sensing" learners, whereas the 40 percent who learned in what we might call more traditional, college-level styles were called "intuitive" learners. Since the creators of this instrument claim that currently, as much as 75 percent of the general

population may be comprised of the "sensing" type of learner, it follows that community college enrollment would indeed contain 60 percent or more of such students. (Davis and Schroeder 73)

This rudimentary description of the students with whom we're faced in many or most of our classrooms can be expanded, and elucidated, through a brief discussion of three major educational theorists: Jean Piaget, William Perry and Michael Basseches. Each has a descriptive scheme designed to explain the developmental processes involved in attaining adult levels of critical thinking. After briefly examining and comparing their ideas, it should be possible to investigate how our classrooms can more effectively help students to learn not only the content of English literature, but also the process of how to learn in a more critical, abstract and highly developed manner.

Jean Piaget, the Swiss scientist and psychologist, outlined his developmental theories in several major works written between 1926 and 1969. These theories included four principle stages of development: sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operations and formal operations. It is this last stage which had been, until recently, accepted as the fullest formal progress made by the individual toward adult levels of critical thinking.

In the stage of formal operations, the adolescent learns, according to Piagel, to solve "all types of problems." Cognitive structures mature, and problems in the five areas of combinatorial thought, verbal reasoning, hypothetical questions, proportion and conservation of movement can be solved. As an example, in a test of combinatorial thought, the child is presented with five jars of clear liquid, shown a yellow liquid and told that some combination of the clear liquids will produce this yellow color.

Piaget's research demonstrated that up to the age of eleven, the children combined two liquids at a time and then stopped their systematic searching, when they found that none of these combinations produced the desired reaction. At eleven or twelve they began to try all combinations of one, two and three liquids until they reached the answer by combining those numbered one, three and five. Another example, perhaps more easily transferable to the study of literature, involved hypothetical problems which required such assumptions as, "Suppose grass is red..." Prior to the development of formal operational thought, the child is unable to deal with such an argument independent of its content, and protests that grass is, in fact, not red at all. After achieving the level of formal operations, the child can reason from such a hypothetical premise and recognizes that logic can operate independently of assumptions which are factually true. (Wadsworth 104)

Piaget acknowledged that despite the development of formal operational thought by about the age of fifteen, adolescents do appear to reason differently than adults. He cited the egocentricity of the adolescent period as the reason for this and suggested that a real job and its attendant responsibilities in the everyday world finally lead to the "decentering" needed to achieve fully adult thought and cognition. To quote again from The Growth of Logical Thinking: From Childhood to Adolescence, published by Piaget and Inhelder in 1958:

> Objectivity of thought with respect to conflicting issues is attained (and egocentrism lost) when the adolescent assumes adult roles in the real world and can differentiate the many possible points of view.
>
> (Wadsworth 112)

Throughout his description of the movement within and between stages, Piaget spoke of a recurrent egocentrism which accompanies the attainment of each new level, but gradually diminishes as the higher structures are more fully assimilated. After the arrival at formal operations, he posited only "adult roles" as the mechanism whereby the last movement or "decentering" requisite to adult thought can occur. The work of William G. Perry, Jr., of Harvard suggests, however, that further, identifiable stages exist within that movement toward truly adult levels of critical thinking. Perry's scheme was developed on the basis of interviews he and over thirty colleagues conducted with college freshmen during a span of fifteen years.

These "positions," as Perry referred to them, actually comprise a total of nine (or ten, since position four is divided into four a and four b) levels found within four major divisions. The next chart in the appendix represents these four basic positions: dualism, multiplicity, relativism and commitment in relativism. Overall definitions of each of these will precede the more precise delineation of the positions themselves. As descriptors for developmental points which occur beyond the age of fifteen, and indeed often coincide with the college years of eighteen to twenty-one or two, Perry's positions clearly follow and expand on much of Piaget's work. Their precise relationships to the stage of formal operations will be discussed at the close of this section.

Dualism is the assertion that experience, meaning and the known universe can be divided into good and bad, right and wrong, yes and no. It is characterized by a firm belief that such answers do exist, for everything, and can be acquired if only sufficient effort is expended. If Beowulf doesn't seem to be a hero in contemporary terms, then differences between Anglo-Saxon

and contemporary values couldn't possibly be the explanation. Multiplicity, the next higher stage or level, recognizes that a variety of opinions and values may exist in some areas. Its adherents believe, however, that in those instances it is virtually impossible to choose among them. Further, right answers are still seen as available in certain instances. Maybe Anglo-Saxon and modern values differed, but ours are probably still "better." In relativism, diverse opinions can be compared, analyzed and weighed. Knowledge is seen here as contextual, as dependent on the area for consideration and those doing the considering. Choice is possible, although some areas remain in which reasonable disagreement may be inevitable. Beowulf's actions may be more fully explicable in terms of Anglo-Saxon beliefs. Commitment in relativism, the last identified level, makes affirmation and choices among beliefs possible within the context of relativism. The individual sees his or her own agency as coming from within in such choices. (Perry 79-80) Now, Beowulf can be seen as an epic hero on the archetypal plane, but as also appearing in a work based in Anglo-Saxon Christian and pagan values and with its own structural requirements.

These, then, are the four major levels of development which Perry and his associates have suggested may occur, or at least begin, during the years of the college experience. The nine or ten more clearly defined positions within these stages are noted on the next chart. As they are explained, a characteristic question is included which a student might ask at each position of development. Perry becomes even more precise in the article, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth: The Making of Meaning," and defines the transitions between positions. For this survey, only the positions themselves are defined, as follows, paraphrasing Perry's student interviews:

1) Basic Duality: My task is to learn Right Answers. All teachers areauthorities who know Right Answers.What's the Answer?

2) Multiplicity Prelegitimate: My task is to find the particular True Authorities who know right answers. (read "goodteachers")
What does the teacher give as the answer?

3) Multiplicity Legitimate but Subordinate: Some ambiguities seem to lead to right answers. But what's the difference between what's right and what They want?
What questions does the teacher leave open--on the way to right answers?

4)a Multiplicity Coordinate: Oh--I see--no one is wrong, if Authority doesn't know. There's a double split between the rightness of Authority and the rightness of anybody on other questions.
So what's your opinion?

4)b Relativism Subordinate: Well...if you have to support your opinion, then maybe Authority itself has its own reasoning process, too. Then maybe ideas can be better or worse, in terms of reasoning and the way they're expressed, instead of just right or wrong.
So what's the support for your opinion?

5) Relativism: Everything has its own rules, its context. It's not a matter of what Authority wants, but of the need to be precise in each area, or to transfer what I've learned

about <u>how</u> to think about things from one area to another.

Within what context do you find support for your opinion?

(Perry 80-90)

At this point, Perry states that students may retreat and escape from a world of relativism by returning to Position 2. He suggests that the political radicalism of the late sixties and early seventies may have been a way to return to a point at which dualism was still operable and Right Answers still existed outside the students themselves. He suggests further that students who are able to move to Position 6, "experience in themselves the origin of meanings, which they had previously expected to come to them from outside." (Perry 92) To return to definition of the final developmental positions:

6) Commitment Foreseen: So no one is Right, in the sense of being able to determine every answer and point of view for me. I have to begin thinking about where I stand in terms of ideas, actions.

Within what context do I find support for my opinions?

7) Initial Commitment: So I have to decide what's Right and acknowledge the complexities of knowledge, thought, action.

Why didn't that settle everything?

8) Commitment Questioned: Now I see that I have to balance beliefs, commitments, in terms of importance, energy, time.

And I see that choices among courses of action and ideas occur continually over time.

Can I manage to balance my commitments?

9) Relativism Affirmed: This is the way things are. I need to find a balance, to realize that there are constantly experiences of doubt and tension if you're open to understanding the world around you.

(Perry 92-96)

Perry's scheme, then, seems to apply to cognitive development at far higher levels than those present at Piaget's stage of formal operations, and to characterize what Piaget called the quality of "adult thinking." It's also important to note, that, as Perry remarks, "It is in the affirmation of Commitments that the themes of epistemology, intellectual development, ethics and identity merge...Commitments structure the relativistic world by providing focus in it and affirming the inseparable relation of the knower and the known." (Perry 97)

Numerous experiments have been tried with curricular and course content based wholly or partially on the Perry scheme since it was first published in 1970. In addition, studies have examined the relationships between Piaget's stage of formal operations and the later development which Perry and others describe. Indeed, Perry reports that one researcher has documented an actual decline in strictly formal operational abilities in an experimental population followed from high school through graduate school. As quoted by Perry, King has stated that, "logic, so necessary to solutions of 'puzzles' in physics, is inadequate for addressing 'problems' in life." (Perry 100) Further and more

recent work with the upper levels of cognition and critical thinking has been done by the third major theorist included in this survey, Michael Basseches of Clark University.

Basseches identifies three basic levels of adult cognitive development: universalism, relativism and dialectical thinking. Universalism is defined as a belief in, as its title suggests, fixed, universal systems and truths. He suggests that those whose thinking exists primarily at this level view any attempt at more relativistic reasoning as mere "sloppiness," possibly due to an inability to perceive genuine logic and order. (Basseches 10)

Relativistic thinking, in this scheme, involves a positive feeling about diversity of opinions and ideas. However, this form of relativism declines to choose any system or value over another, and insists that such determinations are not only inappropriate but impossible. Just as, to revive an earlier example, a universalist might state that Beowulf wasn't a hero because he watched one of his men be killed by Grendel, a relativist would regard the question of his heroic status as susceptible to two equally valid cultural viewpoints, with no method for stating that one is more correct than the other. (Basseches 11)

Basseches' third category, which he calls dialectical thinking, regards the creation of new ways of seeing, ordering and structuring the universe as the most valuable method of thought. Dialectical thinkers share with universalists the feeling that relativists are actually retreating from the search for order; they share with relativists the feeling that choosing one all-inclusive ordering should not cause an end to the process of inquiry.

They would seek areas of synthesis and opportunities for further questioning in any attempt to balance differing viewpoints. For them the creative tension between Anglo-Saxon and modern values can illuminate our understanding of Beowulf as hero and of the poem itself. (Basseches 11)

Basseches feels that he has continued tracing Piaget's formal operational stage into the realm of adult development. His research, like Perry's, involved tape recorded interviews, although questions and structure were of a more directive nature than those used by Perry. Information collected in this manner led Basseches to develop twenty-four "moves," which he divides into four major schemata the individual uses to progress to more advanced levels of critical, dialectical thought. The four schemata are called "motion-oriented," "form-oriented," "relationship- oriented," and "meta-formal. "The first move is the recognition of the traditional dialectical "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" model of thought; the last is an affirmation that multiple perspectives and transformations of thought are in themselves a valuable means of creating order. (Basseches 74) If the goal of formal operations seems to have been "problem-solving," then the end, or rather open-ended goal of Basseches' dialectical stage would be the activity of "problem-finding."

The next chart in the appendix is an attempt to relate and integrate the three approaches to development and critical thinking just surveyed. If Piaget's stage of formal operations comprises the highest defined point in his developmental scheme, it would seem to correspond with the lowest stage for Perry and Basseches, those respectively labelled dualism and universalism. Similarly, Perry's more advanced stages of multiplicity and relativism would

appear to at least partially correspond to Basseches' idea of relativisic thinking. At the upper points on these two schemes, Perry seems to suggest a kind of closure at the point that "Commitment in relativism" is seen as a positive state, although Perry does posit this stage as an ongoing process. Basseches labels the dialectical stage as one which has identifiable schematic points and changes within it, but also as a stage which must involve open-ended and continual comfort with the activities of restructuring, questioning, and problem-finding.

This research makes two significant general contributions to the specific pursuit of more effective classroom teaching in areas such as the English literature survey courses. First, if we accept the notion that the highest level of critical thinking is not achieved by the middle or end of the high school years, then we recognize that the college curriculum should logically address not only content but also, as mentioned earlier, the area of learning itself. Some theorists assert that thinking skills can be most effectively taught in separate courses and exercises, and should therefore be outside the domain of other classroom endeavors.

Although we may not yet have arrived at a professional consensus on the degree to which critical thinking skills should actually be taught within each class, we are undeniably in possession of a valuable tool for understanding our students' levels and modes of learning. Suggestions for classroom applications given here will focus on acknowledging students' cognitive levels as an indicator for teaching style and, to some extent, for choices in course content, rather than teaching directly to individual stages or trying to promote unrealistic growth or progress to higher stages within only one or two semesters.

A second benefit of developmental research and theory is the manner in which it can compliment and illuminate previous work on learning styles and more recent exploration of moral and ethical development by Kohlberg, Gilligan and others. Joseph Williams has integrated the stage theories of Piaget and Perry with those of Kohlberg to produce an overall three-part scheme which he labels "pre-socialization," "socialization," and "post-socialization." This work is not included here due to its focus on moral/ethical implications, rather than on this study's more primary theme of academic content. These correlations are explored by Kohlberg and Gilligan, as well as Williams. Learning styles theory, however, has been popular over the past ten to fifteen years, and its insights mesh with and are expanded by developmental research. In fact, Perry raises the provocative question of whether learning styles may change and adjust as the individual moves through more advanced levels of cognitive development. (Perry 102)

The most efficient and flexible learners are, in learning styles theory, said to possess learning skills associated with all styles. If Perry is right, and evolving stages also cause evolution in learning styles, the previous styles might still be accessible in the situations where they're needed. The student who is able to learn from, for example, concrete, hands-on experience as well as from profoundly abstract situations and presentations is undeniably more versatile and better equipped than the learner who has only one of these styles available. As McCarthy might say, such learners progress not necessarily up a ladder, but "around the circle" of learning styles.

In acknowledging these two principle benefits of developmental stage theory, that is, awareness of student levels for classroom planning and some integration of these levels with actual student learning style, we come naturally to the next portion of this study: just how do these students learn and why should I try to teach them a course such as the English literature survey? Or even if I know I should re-emphasize liberal learning, can I also promote skills in analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and not only problem-solving but problem-finding?

At this juncture, it seems appropropriate to return to the earlier reference to Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge, the next chart in the appendix. Benjamin Bloom's 1950 outline of the structure of knowledge within any one field fits quite logically into the overall theoretical idea of cognitive development of the individual. The basics of knowledge, understanding and application are at the level of dualism: they lead the student to the right answers within a single context. However, the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate in multiple contexts occurs at higher points in the evolution of critical thinking. The last chart is an attempt to synthesize all of these systems into a descriptive model of the "New" student. Classroom examples will derive from the first semester of the survey course, the class within which these principles have been applied.

Perry's sample between 1970 and 1979 seems to have been characterized by a majority of students who were already at position 5 or 6 in the developmental hierarchy. (Perry 98) Remembering that the sample subjects in these studies were all Harvard-Radcliffe freshmen may reinforce our suspicion that the majority of students in our classrooms are nearer to stages of dualism and beginning multiplicity. That recognition can help us move from the airy

heights of theory to the practical realities of the classroom in six specific areas: 1) intrinsic worth of the subject matter, in terms of promoting cognitive growth as well as content knowledge; 2) content choices within the course; 3) lecture materials, particularly in terms of providing background and context; 4) class discussion and questioning; 5) writing assignments--topics and formats; and 6) testing, particularly test construction.

With reference to the first area, intrinsic cognitive worth of English literature, Claire Gaudiani, whose primary expertise is in the teaching of foreign languages and literature, feels strongly about teaching literature of other languages and other periods. She feels that the inclusion of such material in our curricula naturally promotes cognitive development by virtue of the need to widen contextual frameworks to understand it, to adopt more than simple dualism as a viewpoint. In a recent publication, Gaudiani is eloquently clear on these points:

> Good writing, as I.A. Richards says, contains appraisals of human existence. It reminds readers that certain specific as well as certain general questions continue to matter. The systematic study of literature teaches us how to interpret relational systems, avoid simplistic thinking, develop judgment and taste. It combines cognitive activities like classification, discrimination, and exploration of facts and consideration of the nature of evidence with imaginative activities that reproduce for readers the sensous experience of the text in mysterious ways. The study of literature develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills. . . in dealing with foreign (we can read, earlier) language texts, students can take nothing for granted. Being less familiar with the language,

> culture, history and author, the student must exercise a wide range of skills. Primary among them are the capacities to develop, test and affirm or recompose hypotheses; to recognize patterns of internal logic and external implications; and to draw conclusions from evidence. In short, the foreign language text trains students in some of the most taxing problem-solving skills required for work in the modern world.
>
> (Guadiani 295-96)

Evidently, Claire Gaudiani believes that the skills required for success in literature courses, especially those in foreign or earlier texts, promote all of the higher order thinking skills outlined by cognitive theorists.

The second classroom application involves choices for content and emphasis within the general rubric of the available subject matter. Because students' content background probably has not included previous contact with the material, or at least not with much of it, in-depth study is both valid and necessary. Devoting three or four sessions to discussing Beowulf in terms of content, structure and theme may be more profitable for students than also attempting to rush through Sir Gawain and Piers Plowman. Students are also likely to find the Middle English versions of the Canterbury Tales at least forbidding, if not totally discouraging. One solution is, to require students to be able to translate the first fourteen lines of the General Prologue on an exam, but to provide interlinear translations of the tales for assigned reading. If students do a paper on one or more additional tales they can choose a modern English prose or poetry translation, both because focus is then on the content of the tale and as an added inducement to read more Chaucer! Requiring the interlinear version for class discussion does limit

the number of tales which can be assigned, and other instructors might choose to discuss additional tales in modern English versions. The point here is that the objectives to be considered for undergraduates at this stage of cognitive development seem to dictate a reasonable compromise between familiarity with the linguistic features of Middle English and access to the richness of Chaucer's tales, in terms of content, structure and social commentary. The same principle of depth before breadth builds the content knowledge necessary to develop skills of analysis at every point during the course, and can govern the choice of the number of Shakespeare sonnets, plays, etc. to be covered. If a thorough (if there is such a thing) reading of Hamlet gives students time to appreciate aspects of structure, theme and interpretation in reading Shakespearean tragedy, then they'll be able to use these skills in their semester-long Shakespeare courses, if they become English majors. If they don't, they will still gain more from careful study of one or two plays than from a hapazard, too-rapid trip through several in the midst of a survey course. This leads logically to the next concern, that of lecture materials. What should we include in order to give our students an optimal chance for both cognitive growth and content mastery?

Historical background is essential for our "New Students'" understanding of materials read in the English literature survey. Their knowledge of English history, and of the history of Western Civilization in general, is likely to be rudimentary, at best. Each major segment of the course must begin with a history lecture which stresses not dates and places, but general events and concerns of the era. These data have to be reiterated as the literature is discussed; if students begin to relate Chaucer's pilgrims to the evolving class structure of the later medieval period, then the groundwork for moving to Perry's stages of multiplicity and relativism is being created.

Hand-outs, charts, blackboard writing and films seem to be enormously helpful in the lecture situation, far more than would necessarily be needed by the more traditional student. The melding of such concrete, visual input with orally-presented lecture material helps students grasp and retain more detail. It may help to hand out copies of lecture notes to students who want to compare them with their own. The principle is, as always, to make content knowledge available so that not only understanding and application, but the higher levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the literary materials can become possible.

Discussion and questioning can also be conducted for these students as a means to promote higher order thinking skills. Content questions, the who, what, when, and where, will be most easily answered by our "New" students, and should be fully covered before more analytical inquiry is attempted. Far more than with traditional students, it's important to establish that students know exactly who the Pardoner and the Summoner are, before attempting to assess their function and import as characters. When they realize that they can follow the plot in Hamlet or in selections from Paradise Lost or Pilgrim's Progress, they are far more likely to be comfortable in attempting to speculate on the how? why? and what if? of a given work. Small group discussions can be extremely fruitful, in allowing the quieter student to "be wrong" without enduring total exposure. In one class session, four small groups ferreted out the main ideas in one of the four Bacon essays assigned for that day; students then chose a "guest lecturer" from each group to present their conclusions at the blackboard, complete with significant line references. Enough familiarity and comfort at the level of data enable students to dare to move beyond "What's the right answer?" to "What's your

opinion?" and even, perhaps, to venture toward, "What do I think--and why?" As with lecture notes, summaries of assigned readings might be made available after some period of discussion has occurred; a plot summary shouldn't substitute for reading the assignments, but can fill in the gaps not covered in discussion or lecture.

The fifth area, the assignment of papers in the course, can be similarly informed by a simultaneous concern for content and cognitive growth. The first paper might be a character study and can be based largely on assigned reading and lectures. If the class reads "The Wife of Bath's Tale," and the student is able to analyze well enough to extract a coherent character study from those materials, that's a good first step toward learning to write a literary paper. Hand-outs can describe the process of finding a topic, narrowing it, developing a preliminary thesis, testing it against the text, revising the thesis and writing the paper. Students come to the office with a first or second draft, and seem to welcome that opportunity to be shown problems in content as well as in mechanics and grammar. As the paper assignments progress, students may next be asked to write an explication of a speech or an analysis of a scene from Shakespeare which was not covered in depth in class, still relying on textual, rather than critical sources. The third paper is an analysis of a metaphysical or Cavalier poem not covered in class; in addition, if the student has found a poet whom we haven't covered in the syllabus, it helps to require a brief biographical summary, just to be sure that they know whose work they're writing about! The fourth paper is on an essay not covered in class, usually by Addison and Steele or Johnson. Again, they are not required to include critical sources, although by this point in the course, many choose to do so. Progress in their ability to

analyze the work itself seems sufficient for the first semester of the survey; if, in addition, they attempt to synthesize information from several sources, even more cognitive growth has occurred.

The sixth area of course materials is the thorny problem of test construction, i.e., should my tests be objective or essay? One answer to that query is yes, both. Students who are operating most efficiently at the level of dualism, with the materials of information, understanding and application, will be able to display their mastery in true-false, identification, short answer, and, of course, multiple choice--the type of objective question which can most successfully be constructed to also require at least some analysis in order to identify the correct choice. Objective items should be combined with essay questions that require the student to attempt some analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the course materials. A fifty-fifty split at the beginning of the course can be shifted toward the end of the semester, so that fewer objective items are included. In addition, one essay question on each test can ask for a summary of major historical and literary currents during the era under consideration; writing this answer requires a blend of application and analysis, and enables students to work with both skills. Shifting the emphasis in test construction, like moving the paper assignments away from readings already covered in class, is designed to promote student cognitive growth after establishing confidence and comfort with course materials. If it actually adds measurably to cognitive growth, it has truly provided a double benefit. The student whose first paper argues that Beowulf wasn't really a hero and whose last one explores the simultaneous presence of reverence and wit in Addison's "Westminster Abbey" is unusual--but not unique!

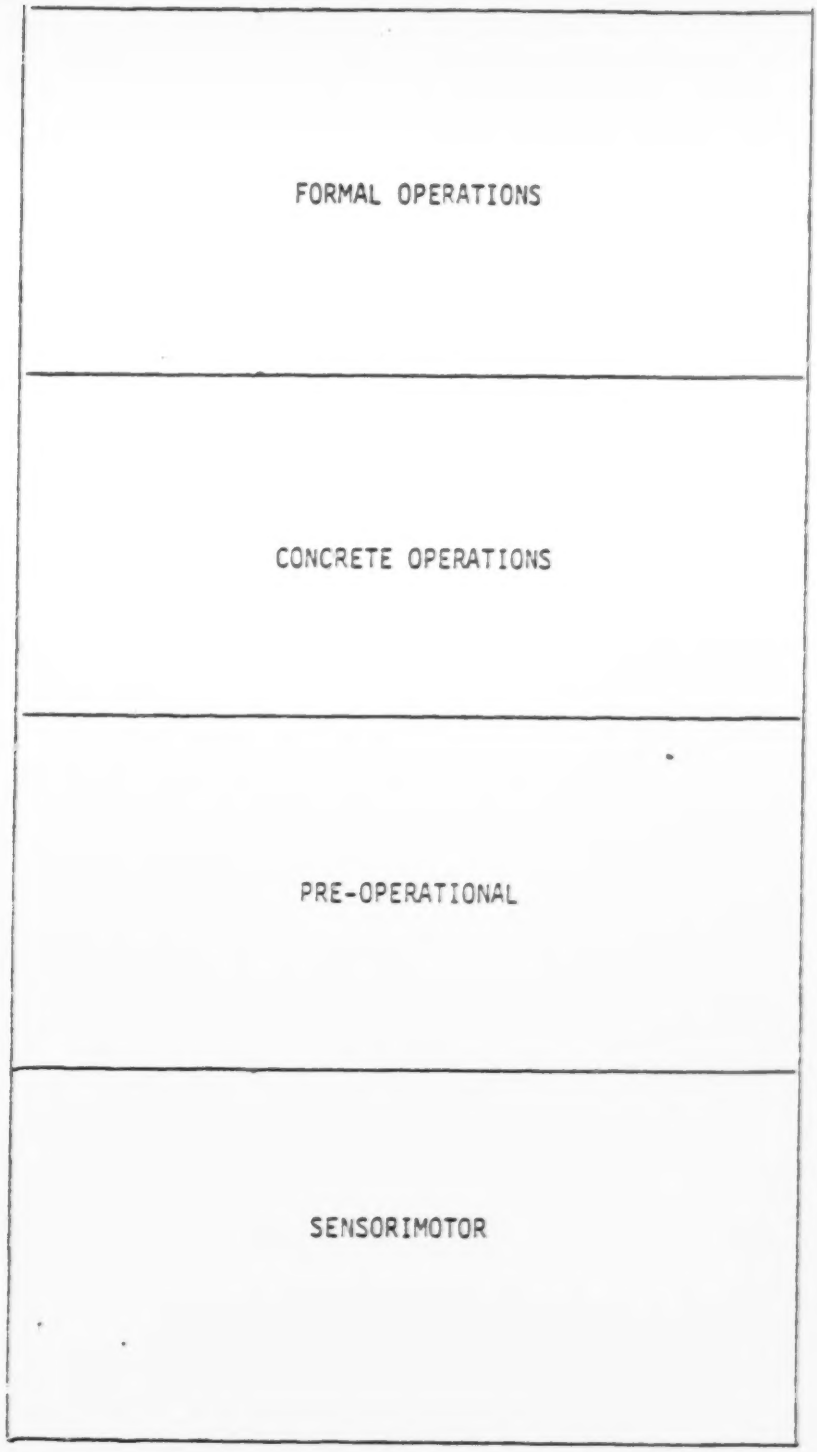
In summary, awareness of our students' learning levels and styles can certainly enable us to feel less frustrated with their inability, in many cases, to think and appreciate as we do. Nor should we blame ourselves if a one or two-semester course still doesn't result in a student who speaks and writes as brilliantly and passionately about literary materials as we'd prefer. What we can, and must do, in order to preserve these courses as part of our liberal arts curricula, is first, make the material accessible to the students at their point of entry -a point which we have called dualism, formal operations, the more concrete end of the reasoning hierarchy. Once our methodology has helped them to grasp the data of the course, the background detail, factual matters, formal concerns, yes or no aspects, then they can begin to analyze, synthesize and evaluate, and to find some comfort with the dialectical tension of many possibilities, many answers.

On one recent morning, several students began to argue about Hamlet's indecisive pattern of behavior through the first four acts of the play. One of the women in the class said, "Okay, so Hamlet is in his twenties, maybe even thirty. Why doesn't he <u>do</u> something? I mean, hasn't he had any experiences in his life that help him take charge a little more?" To which another woman responded, "Well, even if he has, what's normal about being told by a ghost that your uncle killed your father? I mean, what could possibly prepare you for this, anyway? How could anybody know how to react?" And a young man added, "Yeah, I mean we talked about the Renaissance being a time when people were interested in questions of action versus inaction, and look at the situation this guy is in. I mean, he's really under a lot of stress! And when he did do something, he stabbed the wrong guy!" And so it goes, with the students using their information about plot and background to try to

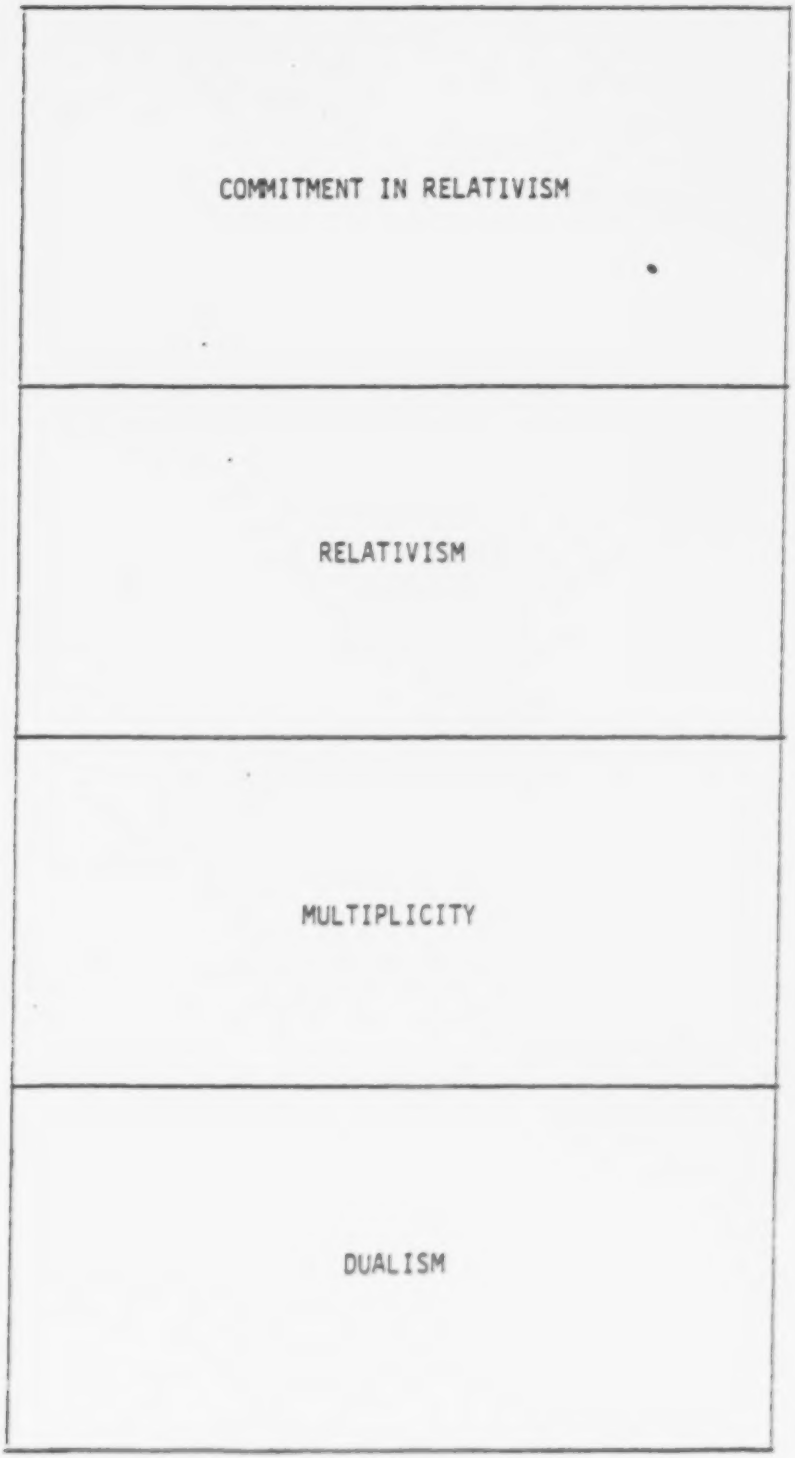
reason through the complexities of one of our most intriguing literary problems. When I said, "You know, this is part of the discussion that's been going on for over three hundred years," there were some nods and smiles of recognition, some puzzled looks.

The tool of cognitive and developmental theory suggests that students who can't be comfortable with this kind of diversity are not necessarily either slow or recalcitrant; they're simply still finding their feet in relativism, and may not be able to reach that stage of development during the weeks and months they spend in our classrooms. However, we can at least appreciate their positions, try to assist them in their own particular journeys and feel more genuinely their need for academic understanding and support. As Perry has said, "Many would hope to encourage in their students the values of Commitment. . .To meet this promise, we must all learn how to validate for our students a dialectical mode of thought. . .and then to assist them in honoring its limits. To do this, we need to teach dialectically--that is, to introduce our students, as our greatest teachers have introduced us, not only to the orderly certainties of our subject matter but to its unresolved dilemmas. This is an art that requires timing, learned only by paying close attention to students' ways of making meaning." (Perry 109) This study has been designed to offer some tools that will enable us all to pay closer attention to our own students' ways of making meaning as they study English literature.

PIAGET: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT



PERRY: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT



PERRY: DEVELOPMENTAL POSITIONS WITHIN STAGES

COMMITMENT IN RELATIVISM

9) COMMITMENT AFFIRMED-

RELATIVISM

8) COMMITMENT QUESTIONED-

7) INITIAL COMMITMENT-

6) COMMITMENT FORESEEN-

5) RELATIVISM-

MULTIPLICITY

4b) RELATIVISM SUBORDINATE-

4a) MULTIPLICITY COORDINATE-

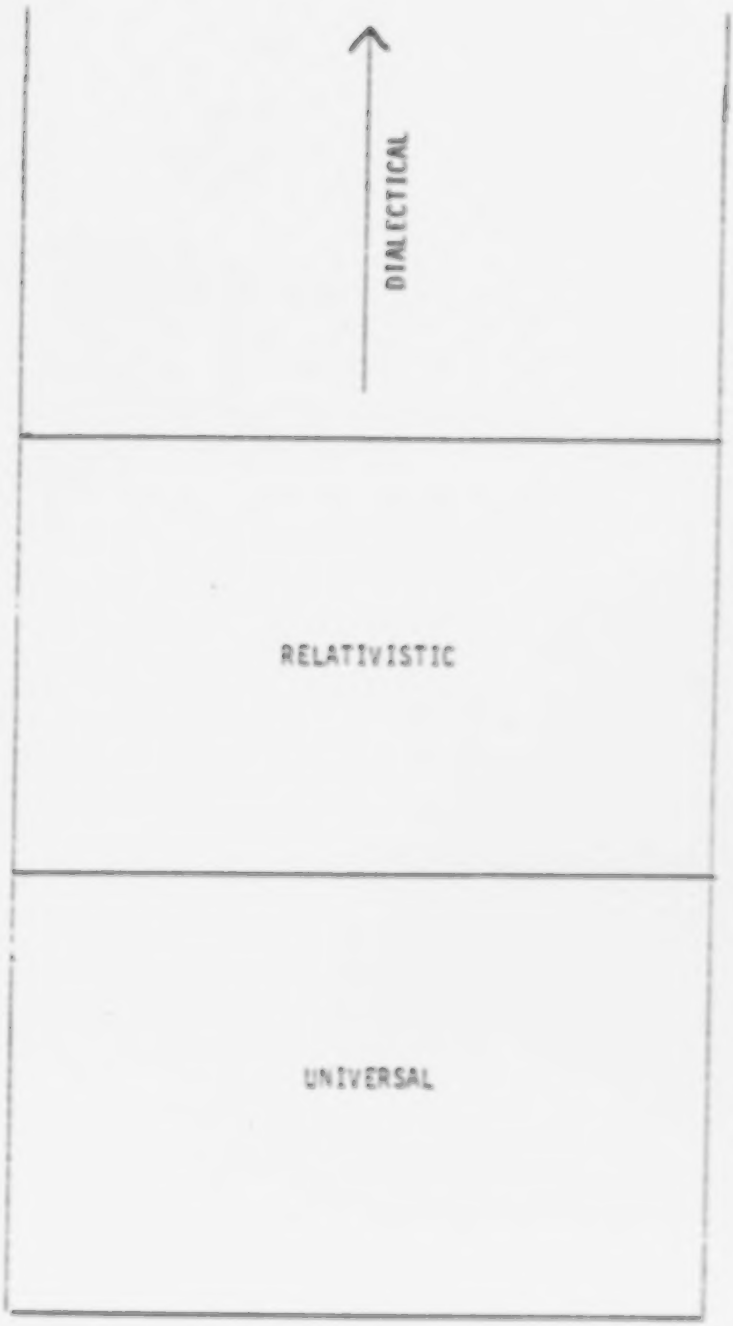
3) MULTIPLICITY LEGITIMATE BUT SUBORDINATE-

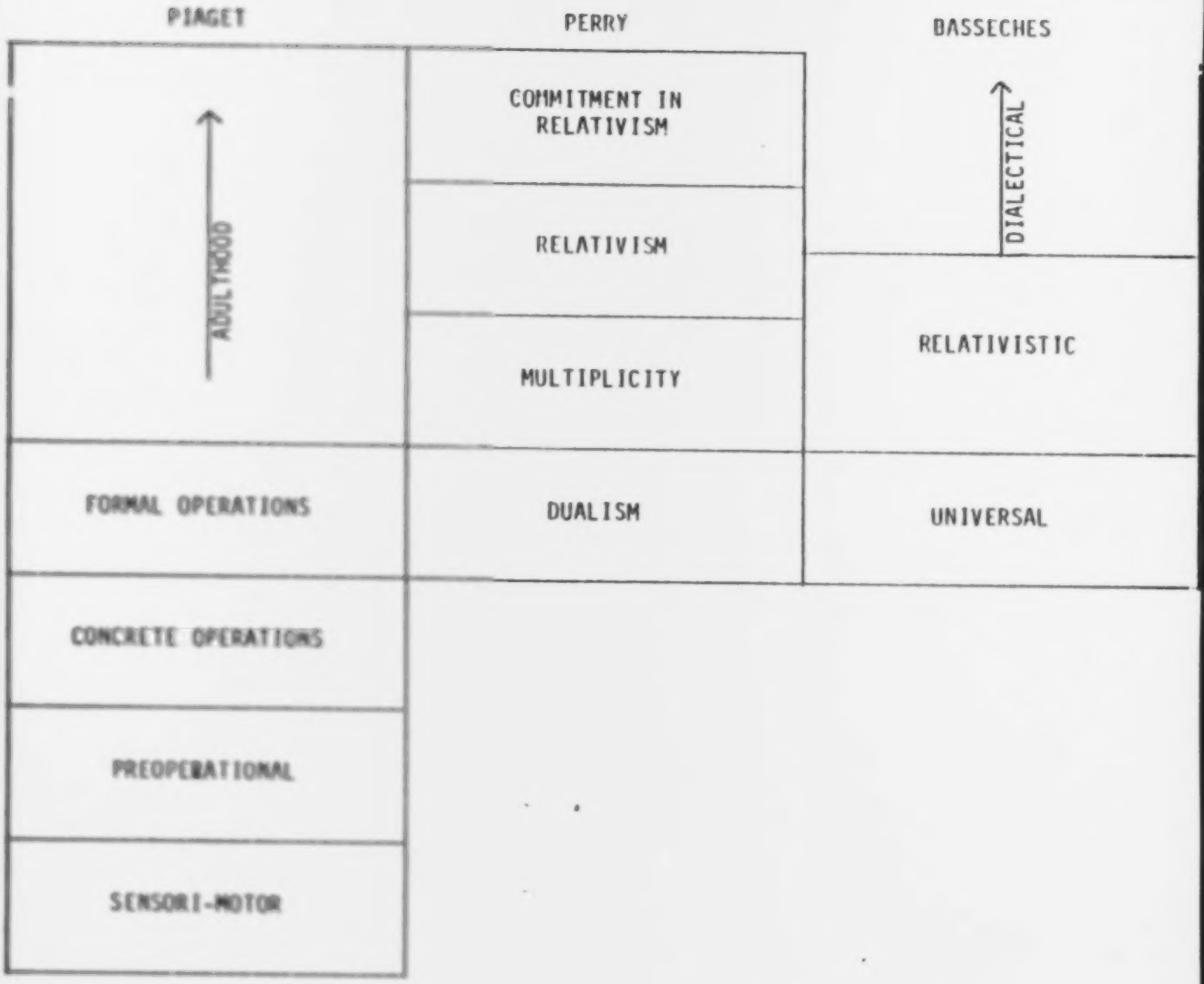
2) MULTIPLICITY PRELEGITIMATE-

DUALISM

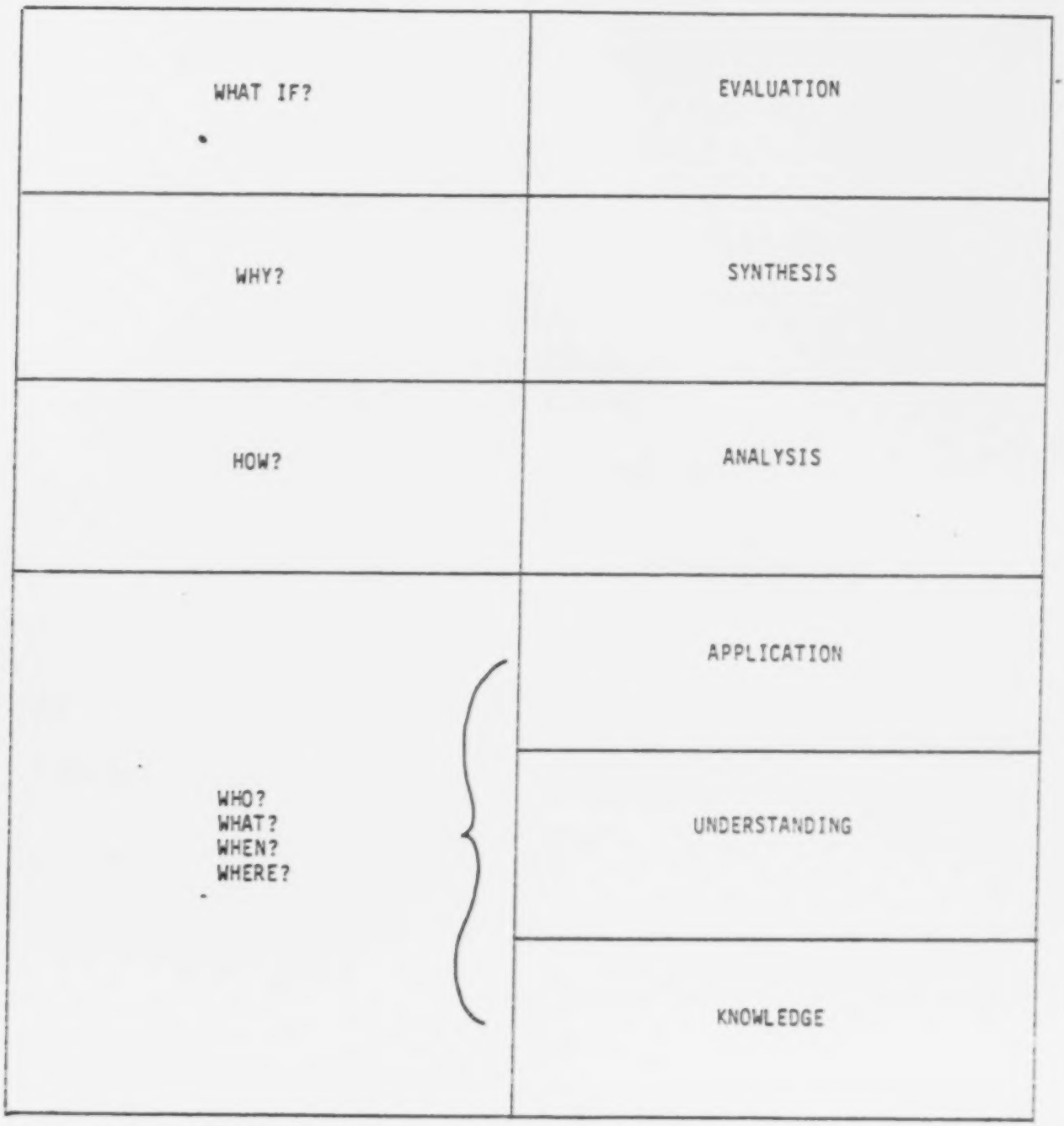
1) BASIC DUALITY-

BASSECHES: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT




PIAGET
PERRY
BASSECHES
ADULTHOOD
COMMITMENT IN RELATIVISM
RELATIVISM
MULTIPLICITY
DIALECTICAL
RELATIVISTIC
FORMAL OPERATIONS
DUALISM
UNIVERSAL
CONCRETE OPERATIONS
PREOPERATIONAL
SENSORI-MOTOR

QUESTIONING AND BLOOM'S TAXONOMY



"NEW" STUDENTS	"TRADITIONAL" GOALS
CONCRETE, IMMEDIATE, PRODUCT-ORIENTED	ABSTRACT, DELAYED, PROCESS-ORIENTED
FORMAL OPERATIONS	ADULT REASONING
DUALISM: RIGHT ANSWERS	MULTIPLICITY, RELATIVISM, COMMITMENT
UNIVERSALISM	DIALECTICAL REASONING
SENSING	INTUITIVE
CONCRETE SEQUENTIAL	ABSTRACT RANDOM
INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE, APPLICATION	ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, EVALUATION
WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE?	HOW? WHY? WHAT IF?
PROBLEM-SOLVING	PROBLEM-FINDING

Selected References

Association of American Colleges. "Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community." February, 1985.

Basseches, Michael. "Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development." Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1985.

Benderson, Albert. (Ed.) "Focus; Critical Thinking." Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1984.

Bloom, Benjamin and Broder, Lois. Problem Solving Processes of College Students. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.

Davis, Marjorie T. and Charles C. Schroeder. "'New Students' in Liberal Arts Colleges: Threat or Challenge?" In J. Watson and R. Stevens (Eds.) Pioneers and Pallbearers: Perspectives on Liberal Education. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983, 147-168.

Caudiani, Claire. Strategies for Development of Foreign Language and Literature Programs. New York: Modern Language Association, 1984.

Gaudiani, Claire. "Values in Language and Literature Courses." Unpublished Address to Conference on Critical Thinking and the Formation of Values, University of Chicago, May, 1985.

Gilligan, Carol. "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality." Harvard Education Review, 47, 1977, 481-517.

Glaser, Robert. "Education and Thinking: The Role of Knowledge." American Psychologist, February, 1984, 93-103.

Gregorc, Anthony and Ward, Helen. "A New Definition for Individual." NASSP Journal, Feb. 1977, Vol. 61, No. 406, 20-26.

Kohlberg, Lawrence. The Philosophy of Moral Development. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982.

McCarthy, Bernice. "The 4MAT System: teaching to learning styles with right/left mode techniques." Arlington Heights, IL: EXCEL, Inc., 1980.

McPeck, John E. Critical Thinking and Education. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.

Perry, William G. Jr. "Cognitive and Ethical Growth: The Making of Meaning." Today's Students and Their Needs.

Piaget, Jean and Inhelder, Barbel. The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence. Basis Books, 1958, trans. 1969.

Russell, Wallace C. "The Fiery Fall and Incredible Rise of Liberal Education." The Key Reporter, Vol. 50, No. 4, Summer, 1985, 2-4.

Suhor, Charles. "Thinking Skills in English--and Across the Curriculum." Urbana, IL: Eric Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1984.

Wadsworth, Barry J. "Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development. New York: David McKay, 1973.

Williams, Joseph M. "A Pragmatic Overview of Developmental Research: Its Implications for Teaching Specific Domains of Discourse." Critical Thinking and the Formation of Values, University of Chicago, May, 1985.